# The Story

The simple principle underlying most of the syntheses discussed in this book is ‘visible teaching and learning.’ Visible teaching and learning occurs when learning is the explicit and transparent goal, when it is appropriately challenging, and when the teacher and the student both (in their various ways) seek to ascertain whether and to what degree the challenging goal is attained. Visible teaching and learning occurs when there deliberate practice aimed at attaining mastery of the goal, when there is feedback given and sought, and when there are active, passionate, and engaging people (teacher, students, peers) participating in the act of learning. It is teachers seeing learning through the eyes of students, and students seeing teaching as they key to their ongoing learning. The remarkable feature of the evidence is that the greatest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers. When students become their own teachers, they exhibit the self-regulatory attributes that seem most desirable for learners (self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-assessment, self-teaching). Thus, it is visible teaching and learning by teachers and students that makes the difference.

A key premise is that the teacher’s view of his or her role is critical. It is the specific mind frames that teachers have about their role – and most critically a mind frame within which they ask themselves about the effect that they are having on student learning. Fundamentally, the most powerful way of thinking about a teacher’s role is for teachers to see themselves as *evaluators* of their effects on students. Teachers need to use evidence-based methods to inform, change, and sustain these evaluation beliefs about their effect. These beliefs relate to claims about what each student can do as a consequence of the teacher’s actions, and how every resource (especially peers) can be used to play a part in moving students from what they can do now to where the teacher considers they should be – and to do so in the most efficient, as well as effective, manner. It matters what teachers do – but what matters *most* is having an appropriate mind frame related to the impact of what they do. An appropriate mind frame combined with appropriate actions work together to achieve a positive learning effect.

What I am *not* saying is that ‘teachers matter’: this cliché is the most unsupported claim from the evidence in *Visible Learning.* It is a cliché that masks the fact that the greatest source of variance in our system relates to teachers (both between teachers, and even in that a single teacher can vary in his or her impact across students, across days, and across lessons). What *does* matter is teachers having a mind frame in which they see it as their role to evaluate their effect on learning.

As I argued in *Visible Learning* (Hattie, 2009: 22-4), when teachers see learning occurring or not occurring, they intervene in calculated and meaningful ways to alter the direction of learning to attain various shared, specific, and challenging goals. In particular, they provide students with multiple opportunities and alternatives for developing learning strategies based on the surface and deep levels of learning some content or domain matter, leading to students building conceptual understanding of this learning, which the students and teachers then use in future learning. Learners can be so different, making it difficult for a teacher to achieve such teaching acts: students can be in different learning places at various times, using a multiplicity of unique learning strategies, meeting different and appropriately challenging goals. Learning is a very personal journey for the teacher and the student, although there are remarkable commonalities in this journey for many teachers and students. It requires much skill for teachers to demonstrate to all of their students that they can see the students’ ‘perspective, communicate it back to them so that they have valuable feedback to self-assess, feel safe, and learn to understand others and the content with the same interest and concern’ (Cornelius-White, 2007:23).

The act of teaching requires deliberate interventions to ensure that there is cognitive changes in the student; thus the key ingredients are being aware of the learning intentions, knowing when a student is successful in attaining those intentions, having sufficient understanding of the student’s prior understanding as he or she comes to the task, and knowing enough about the content to provide meaningful and challenging experiences so that there is some sort of progressive development. It involves a teacher who knows a range of learning strategies with which to supply the student when they seem not to understand, who can provide direction and redirection in terms of the content being understood and thus maximize the poer of feedback, and who has the skill to ‘get out the way’ when learning is progressing towards the success criteria.

Of course, it helps if these learning intentions and success criteria are shared with, committed to, and understood by the learner – because in the right caring and idea-rich environment, the learner can then experiment (be right and wrong) with the content and the thinking about the content, and make connections across ideas. A safe environment for the learner (and for the teacher) is an environment in which error is welcomes and fostered – because we learn so much from errors and from the feedback that then accrues from going in the wrong direction or not going sufficiently fluently in the right direction. In the same way, teachers themselves need to be in a safe environment to learn about the success or otherwise of their teaching from others.

To create such an environment, to command a range of learning strategies, and to be cognitively aware of the pedagogical means that enable the student to learn requires dedicated, passionate people. Such teachers need to be aware of which of their teaching strategies are working or not, need to be prepared to understand and adapt to the learner(s) and their situations, contexts, and prior learning, and need to share the experience of learning in this manner in an open, forthright, and enjoyable way with their students and their colleagues.

Hattie, John. *Visible Learning for Teacher: Maximizing Impact on Learning.* (2011) Routledge, New York. (used with permission)